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ABSTRACT

As an agent of the sociocultural system, the school is a formal means of cultural transmission, conveying values, skills, attitudes, cognitive skills, and behavior patterns necessary for membership in society and survival of the sociocultural system. For Mexican Americans and other immigrants, the school also has the responsibility of acculturation. Conceived, established, managed, and staffed largely by white middle class Anglos, the school is more or less an extension of the Anglo child's family. But for the Mexican American child, the school is a source of stress, alienation, cultural confrontation, and oppression. This paper discusses the school as it relates to the Chicano community. A discussion of the Chicano child's background includes: (1) the importance of religion in every aspect of life; (2) the family as the main source of support, security, affection, and identity; (3) the ideal male role of machismo; (4) the common values of honor, self-respect, and self-sufficiency; (5) parents as role models; (6) competitiveness in school; and (7) the home life and traditional Mexican culture which are in sharp contrast to the mainstream and the school culture. Among the 17 educational policy recommendations are: making schools bilingual and bicultural; recruitment and training of more Chicanos in schools; and extensive re-education of all school personnel. (NQ)s

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BARRIO SCHOOL: WHITE SCHOOL IN A BROWN COMMUNITY

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BARRIO SCHOOL: WHITE SCHOOL IN A BROWN COMMUNITY

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This paper is based on my involvement and experiences with Mexican Americans over a three-year period; more specifically it is the product of a comprehensive study conducted at the Grove Elementary School (fictitious name) in the town of Sonora (fictitious name), California.

Research Methods: The bulk of the data was collected through standard ethnographic techniques-participation, observation, and interviewing (Molnar, 1971; Pelto, 1970, Rist, 1972; Sindell, 1969, Spindler, 1963; and Wolcott, 1972). Quantitative data for teacher-pupil transaction in the classroom and for staff and PTA meetings were gathered through modified interaction analysis schemes developed by Amidon and Hough (1967), Amidon (1963), and Flanders (1970). Questionnaires were administered to the entire school personnel and to all of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students. Additional data were collected through critical incidents, enumeration, census data, and an Occupational Interest Inventory.

The School and Sociocultural Milieu

This study was based on the assumption that we can neither understand the school thoroughly, appreciate its problems and complexities, nor reform it radically without due regard for its sociocultural context. The school does not exist in a sociocultural vacuum; as a subsystem of society it is structurally and functionally intertwined with society and culture; the school needs society for its raw material and the sociocultural system depends on the school for its survival. It is also said that what happens outside the school is perhaps more important than what takes place within it. Therefore, a brief description of the Sonora town is not only appropriate but essential for our understanding of Grove School.

Sonora town and Grove school were roughly 70% Mexican and 30% Anglo. The town conveys an overwhelming feeling of poverty, isolation, neglect and decay. Few of the streets are paved; there is no zoning; the town is dotted with refuse, debris, junk yards, abandoned autos, garbage dumps, and swamps; there are few trees and fewer lawns in the town. Most of the one-story houses consist of condemned structures hauled from other locations and put atop cinder-block stilts. Forty-eight percent of the homes are substandard, 33% dilapidated, and all of the structures in poor condition. Family size ranges from 4 to 22 with the average being 6. Fifty-nine percent of the population falls under 19 years of age. Entertainment and cultural facilities are virtually non-existent.

Educational attainment among Sonora's residents was low at all age levels; the dropout rate was high. Median school year completed was 8.3; 65% of the 16 and 17-year-olds attended school; 50% of the 25 years and older had completed eight years of school (Gazni Planning Dept., August 4, 1970). There was only one Mexican-American college graduate living in Sonora.

The quality of new immigrants and the low level of education among the town's old residents have led to an unusually high rate of unemployment and/or underemployment. The situation was made worse by the fact that only 40% of the population was of working age. And the highly industrialized nature of the job market in the vicinity allowed very few Mexican-Americans to be fully and gainfully employed. Consequently those who were able to work and could find jobs worked mostly in low-level blue-collar occupations. A 1970 report (Gazni Planning Dept., August 1970) indicated that one-third of Sonora's population was below the poverty level; 50% earned less than $5,000 per year. Per capita income was $1,000. Unemployment ranged from 13.2% to 23%. In addition to these problems the town was also beset with numerous civic, social, political, health, and survival problems.

Grove Elementary School was built in 1956 and is located adjacent to the town. The physical plant is limited; the school does not have a cafeteria, hallways, auditorium, gymnasium, or enough rooms. Of the entire staff only the secretary, the bus driver, the custodians and six of the aides lived in Sonora. The rest commuted to the school from the surrounding middle class communities. Average expenditure per child was $500 per year; to put this into perspective the national average was $858; and expenditure in a nearby upper middle class community was $1400 (Statistical Abstracts of the U.S., 1972). This was the background in which Sonora's children lived and went to school.

The School as a Formal Means of Cultural Transmission

The theoretical framework for this study centers on the acculturative process, defined as "changes brought about in the culture of groups or individuals as adaptation to a culture different from their own takes place" (Spindler, 1963, p. 144). The public school is a formal means of cultural transmission in our society. As Withal and Lewis (1958) point out,

> the process of socializing and acculturating the individual has been institutionalized in our society by setting up schools. Here, trained workers deliberately utilize social interaction to bring about changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the youth put into their charge (Gage, 1963, p. 687).

The school is an agent of the sociocultural system. And in our modern and contemporary society it is the formal mechanism for education, acculturation, enculturation, and socialization. The school transmits, through implicit and explicit means, those values, skills, attitudes, cognitive skills, behavior patterns, etc., which are deemed necessary for membership in society and the survival of the sociocultural system. It must be added, however, that in addition to these pronounced functions, the school also has an elaborate hidden curriculum, entailing credentialing, indoctrination, custodial care, vocational training, and role selection; and, in the case of Mexican Americans and other

immigrants, the school is charged with the additional function of assimilation and "socialization for obedience" (Deutsch).

The school system has been conceived, established, and managed largely by white middle class Anglos. The school system constitutes a bureaucracy; it is staffed by white middle class personnel, and it is committed to serving the mainstream sociocultural system. The school is in its structure, function, organization, standards, norms and so on consistent with the mainstream sociocultural system. For the white middle class child, the school is more or less an extension of his/her family. But for the Mexican American child it is a source of stress, alienation, cultural confrontation and oppression. Traditionally the school has been attempting to melt alien elements into the pot. This assimilation has been conducted through exposure to adult role models and Anglo peers as well as through the explicit and deliberate transfer of cultural content in the school. It is in this sense that we talk about the school as an interface institution. It is the route to cultural migration for the Chicano children, except that the school has not been very successful in its assimilation efforts and that it has not remained an interface institution; it has become a tool of cultural invasion and imperialism; the school has become the scene of cultural confrontation between the mainstream culture and the Mexican American culture.

Our monolithic school system has become an anomaly in our pluralistic society. We must now acknowledge the failure of our school system vis a vis ethnoracial minorities. We must recognize the scientific and institutional racism so prevalent in our schools and take immediate steps to alleviate it. We are just becoming aware that our schools are far from smooth, pedagogical interface organizations; they constitute battle grounds for cultural and racial

confrontation. The battle continues at enormous costs to both sides. As Rosenfeld points out, "America is an amalgam of many cultural traditions and the contribution of many peoples, and the school ought to be one place where these historical and cultural antecedents to our present existence should be appreciated and glorified. Denying a child's worth is a denial of America's most unique potential contribution to human life: the advocacy of cultural pluralism and behavioral diversity." (Rosenfeld, p. 57).

Since, theoretically at least, every child goes through the school, the school becomes a crucial contact point between the Chicano child and the mainstream culture, and the teacher as the cultural broker, mediator and transmitter plays an important role in this process. The school resembles a channel through which cultural packages are passed to the Chicano children; the teacher serves as a gatekeeper who monitors this cultural transmission.

> ...forms of understanding, their content and order of presentation, are blocked, truncated, or expanded, according to changing interpretations at each gate of the channel section. Most gates require keys...(consisting) of cultural perception (viz., terms in which people think about education), values (motivations to acquire, subvert, emphasize, or underplay cultural items), and personality dispositions to behavior (Spindler, 1955, p. 48).

There are several factors which affect cultural transmission in the school; these include the degree of consistency of the values in each of the subcultures; the extent of agreement of the members of the collectivities on these values; the kind of role relations established between participants in the several subcultures; and the perception of one's own role and of content intended for transmission (Siegel in Spindler, 1955, p. 42). These and many other variables are operative at the Grove school in Sonora.

Summary of Mexican American Cultural Traits

Exceptions notwithstanding, the majority of Mexican Americans in Sonora, whatever their level of acculturation to the mainstream culture, possess the

following cultural traits. First, religion plays an important role in every aspect of life. God is perceived as an all-powerful force and man only a part of nature and subject to God's will. God, not man, controls life and nature. When a mishap occurs, the Mexicans blame the circumstances or attribute it to God's will rather than taking responsibility for it. Most Mexican Americans are just consumers of science and technology without exhibiting scientific behavior or believing in cause-and-effect relationships (Madsen, 1964). Church attendance by the young and old, and serving the church, is a regular part of life in Sonora. People showed great respect for religious symbols, the church, the priest and God.

Second, the extended family constitutes a very cherished institution in the lives of Mexican Americans. Family is the main source of support, security, affection and identity. Members are very loyal and respectful toward each other. Respectability is based on age and sex, with the men and older members enjoying the most respect and power. The family provides for one's needs in a world full of hostility, envy, greed, and conspiracies. Visitation among kinsmen is very spontaneous and extended at times. There is a great deal of sharing. The institution of family exerts great demands on individual members. One must pay respect to other members, help whenever it is needed, and protect the family's image, honor, and wellbeing. The family takes precedence over individual needs and interests. The family is extended by the compadre institution. "Compadres or coparents are sponsors who assure carefully defined roles in relation to the other participants in a religious ceremony establishing ritual kinship. The most important compadres are the baptismal godparents of one's children" (Madsen, 1964, p. 47). Compadres are chosen from respected families equal to one's socioeconomic status. The relationship is formal and dignified.

Third, being a "real man" is another important cultural trait among Mexican Americans. The ideal male role is defined as machismo or manliness. Consequently, men constantly try to validate the assumption that they are more intelligent, stronger, and reliable than women. Women are considered as a desirable quantity that must be conquered. A "real man" is one who is proud, self-reliant, and virile. Women are considered weak, submissive, and respectful of men. The wife must be faithful, subordinate, and obedient to her husband. She is not expected to resent her husband's sexual adventures.

Fourth, honor, self-respect, and self-sufficiency are other common values among Mexican Americans. These are closely linked with lack of obligation to non-kinsmen.

Fifth, child rearing among Mexican Americans is in many ways different from that of Anglos. Both parents share in teaching their children how to conduct themselves with dignity and honor in social interaction. Parents serve as role models as well as giving specific instructions to children. An educated person is one who is well brought up and who is polite, graceful, socially acceptable, useful and urbanidad. Informal education in the family is considered more effective and useful than formal schooling for this purpose. An educated person is courteous; he knows how to defend and project himself; he respects the elders and makes himself deserving of respect; he maintains proper relationships with relatives, friends, neighbors, and others; he observes the dignity and individuality of others; he does not offend others by questioning their motives and beliefs, or by proving them wrong; his relationships are formalized.

The mother is warm and loving; she is responsible for the proper upbringing of children, while father makes sure that everyone stays in line and the family image is protected properly. Parent-child relationship is permissive during early childhood. The child is considered an angelito (or an angel) enjoying a great deal of love and attention. An abrupt change in parent-child relations

takes place at puberty. He/she is no longer an angelito. However, he continues to love his mother, obey his father, but respect both.

In short, child rearing among Mexican Americans is characterized by socialization which is in contrast with schooling. Socialization can be defined as the inculcation of basic motivation, cognitive patterns, values, attitudes, and behavior patterns, through informal, spontaneous and routine interaction with parents, siblings, and members of the extended family, -- while schooling is the teaching of standardized and stereotyped knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns by means of standardized and formalized procedure. In socialization, the content, context and methods are highly emotionally charged; this is because of the strong emotional bond between the preceptors (parents) and the children. Socialization is based on and contributes to family solidarity. Socialization is predominant in traditional groups and societies and it is tradition-bound.

Sixth, Chicano children are not very competitive in the school. They dread failure and ridicule from Anglo or Chicano classmates.

Seventh, the Mexican Americans live very Mexican and identify with La Raza - the race. They speak Spanish, visit Mexico whenever they can, eat Mexican food, listen to Latin music, celebrate major Mexican holidays and fiestas, wear Mexican costume, and respond to the voice and symbol of Chicanismo.

Eighth, I suggest that home life and the traditional Mexican culture are very different from, and in sharp contrast to, the mainstream culture and the culture of the school. Life is a constant struggle for survival. Those few who cannot or are not willing to face this struggle resort to various forms of escapism. There is not much time, energy, money, or patience left for leisure, intellectual, or cultural activities. These are luxuries not many Mexican Americans in Sonora can afford. Preoccupation with survival tends to produce

disorder in daily family and individual lives. The home culture lacks the characteristics of order fundamental to the highly organized and achieving middle class school and culture. Mexican American homes are physically, personally, and psychologically disorganized; life does not run on time and according to plans. Henry (1966) suggests that these people lack the cognitive and emotional structure conducive to success in school and the mainstream culture. Their presence in school produces disorganization. The teacher is forced to focus on those who are teachable, i.e., the Anglos or the few Chicanos who have been able to reconcile the incongruities between the two cultures and who can resist peer pressure for nonconformity with school norms.

This is the background of the Chicano child. It should be apparent that the Mexican American culture is incongruent with the school and the mainstream culture in many substantial ways. It is because of this that the Chicano child experiences the "acculturation shock" at school. The school in turn considers him an albatross and threat.

The outcome of a Chicano child's experience in the formal school is the sum of his subculture, the school experience and culture, interaction with his peers, and the degree to which he can translate success in school to concrete payoffs in terms of power, prestige, and income. As it is, he lacks the fear of failure and hope for achievement both in school and in adult life.

The public school is a bureaucracy; and it is a microcosm of the mainstream culture and society. It is managed by white middle class personnel. It is characterized by exclusivity, judgment, evaluation, efficiency, order and organization, time orientation, competition, impersonality, individualism, stratification, and other norms and standards characteristic of mainstream culture. Such features of school life constitute for the Anglo child an extension of his home culture, but they are largely alien to the Chicano child.

Thus school is a bewildering and hostile place that should be avoided if possible. Every day in school brings embarrassment, failure, humiliation, anxiety, crisis in identity, sense of powerlessness (Charnofsky, 1971), and a general feeling of alienation from self, the school, the Mexican culture, and the mainstream world. This situation is compounded by the pervasive "Pygmalion effect" or "the self-fulfilling prophecy" (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) in the school and by the very low self-image of the Chicano child and teacher "classism" and racism. Sexton (1961) points out that

> "What is more behavior-determining than class origin, however, is the class orientation of teachers...teachers in certain vital matters, have a class outlook very similar to that of upper-income groups and quite unlike that of "urban labor" groups....Teachers tend to identify with upper-income groups--with their opinions, aspirations, and way of life--and many of them long to be accepted in this group. If the longing is great enough and the identification strong, there will be little room left for the problems of their poorer charges, little sympathy, little understanding, and little real desire to help" (Sexton, 1961, p. 231).

We witness in the school system instances of scientific and institutional racism, mutual stereotyping and ignorance, cultural invasion and confrontation. Educators--the cultural brokers of the mainstream culture--remain largely ignorant and indifferent in regard to their Chicano charges and their cultural system. What the educators perceive they despise. Representatives of the two systems remain "opaque to, and reject, each other" (Hunt and Hunt in Middleton, 1970, p. 322). School personnel equate the "culture of poverty" with poverty of the culture and cultural difference with cultural deficit. They perceive a cultural vacuum in the case of Chicano children which they attempt to fill with the mainstream culture. The results of such mindless practices by the school are all too obvious. Society is realizing that the "melting pot" theory is no longer valid. In fact even the salad bowl analogy does not apply any more; our schools and the sociocultural scene can be more accurately described as the "frying pan". The "American dream" continues to be the American nightmare for the Chicanos, and the school is largely instrumental and responsible for that.

Educational Policy Recommendations

1. Making schools truly bilingual and bicultural.

2. Recruitment and training of more Chicanos in schools.

3. Involvement of more Chicanos in decision-making at all levels of the educational establishment--a redistribution of power in education.

4. Extensive re-education of all school personnel.

5. Inclusion of sensitivity training, T-groups and so on in teacher education programs.

6. Making "culture therapy" an integral part of teacher education programs.

7. Making anthropology, intercultural communication, and Chicano studies part of pre-and in-service teacher education program.

8. Making home stay and living in Chicano communities a requirement for all personnel in the school.

9. Including training in English as a Second Language and Spanish in teacher education programs.

10. Making the school community center; introducing the community school concept in Chicano communities.

11. Overhauling the school as a social system. Doing away with all of the culture bound tests; implementing a new evaluation system; improving student-teacher transaction; redesigning the curriculum, including Chicano studies in the program; expectation training for Chicano children; making school more congruent.

12. Conducting more research on effective teaching-learning in Chicano children; more ethnographic studies on barrio life and schools.

13. Providing free and adequate breakfast, lunch, and clothes for Chicano children.

14. Instituting in Chicano children the frames of time, space, motion, object, values, attitudes, work and study habits and skills, filling the cognitive gaps early in the school experience.

15. Reconstituting the psychological-social make-up of the children through prolonged, friendly, and spontaneous interaction between school personnel and the children.

16. Reducing student-teacher ratio.

17. Bibliotherapy

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